

The Power of Influence

This past week we had the privilege of sharing the platform with Bill Gothard, founder of Institute in Basic Life Principles/Conflicts. The first time my wife and I heard him was in 1974 as a newlywed couple and his biblical character lessons we heard were life changing. He is seventy-five now and still has a great word from the Lord. As he was speaking last night, I was thinking about how blessed we have been to be associated with great people of God. Along with the association comes the power of influence. It has been said, "You are the same person one year from today except for the books you read and the people you meet." Meeting, knowing and admiring people will help formulate your opinions, convictions and actions for good or for evil. First of all, let me bring to your attention the power of influence:

1. For Good

The Bible says, "*He that walketh with wise men shall be wise...*" (Proverbs 13:20). Jeremiah said, "*I will get me unto the great men, and will speak unto them; for they have known the way of the LORD...*" (Jeremiah 5:5). Insight is given when Jeremiah says, "*...for they have known the way of the Lord...*" Those who have known the way of the Lord have the ability to augment the knowledge of the Lord to others around them.

A godly man who had a measure of influence in my young life was an old Norwegian fisherman named "Pop" Stouning. He looked the part with his dark sea captain's hat and salty sailor's language, minus the cursing. Pop had a boat made by his own hands. He even built the engine located in the center of the boat. I can remember heading out to the Gulf of Mexico on his rig with the fresh morning ocean air welcoming us out to the sea. We would set the trot lines out then go on an island he affectionately named "Captain Johnny's Island." I was taught the value of patience as we set out our lines. "Don't get in a hurry; wait things out and the Lord will bless us with a catch," was his attitude. As I look back I see the value of trusting the Lord even for a catch. One day as Pop and I walked along the shore of our island, I approached a huge empty shell where a shellfish once lived. I kicked it hard, breaking it into a hundred or more pieces. He took me by the arm and looked firmly into my eyes and said, "Son, never do anything like that. That is where life once was; have respect for life, no matter what form, no matter what size." Even today as I think back on his wise words I am reminded of what the Word says, "*For with thee is the fountain of life...*" (Psalm 36:9). I listened to him, for the Bible says, "*Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man, and fear thy God: I am the LORD*" (Leviticus 19:32). Pop Stouning made an indelible impression on my life for good. Then there is the power of influence:

2. For Evil

Never underestimate the power of Influence, for not only good, but sadly for evil. Amnon, King David's oldest son had strong ungodly desires for his half sister Tamar. Even as wicked as he was, he did not appear to think and connive ways to take advantage of her until his encounters with his cousin Jonadab. The

Bible says, *“But Amnon had a friend, whose name was Jonadab, the son of Shimeah David's brother: and Jonadab was a very subtil man”* (II Samuel 13:3). I am convinced Amnon would have never thought up the scheme of wrong doing without the influence of his cousin, Joanadab. The Word says, *“Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners”* (I Corinthians 15:33).

Picture this: A young man is with the wrong crowd. He is driving his car with some friends when they say to stop at this convenience store. Three of his new “wrong friends” get out and soon they are clutching something tight to their chest while running to the car. The doors slam behind them and they scream to the young driver, “Go, go, go!” Unbeknownst to him, they have robbed and killed the owner of the store. He is arrested and sentenced to life imprisonment. He didn't know these guys; he didn't know what they were going to do at the convenience store, yet he must now pay the consequences of hanging with the wrong crowd. Proverbs 1:10-18 says, *“My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not. If they say, Come with us, let us lay wait for blood, let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause: Let us swallow them up alive as the grave; and whole, as those that go down into the pit: We shall find all precious substance, we shall fill our houses with spoil: Cast in thy lot among us; let us all have one purse: My son, walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path: For their feet run to evil, and make haste to shed blood. Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird. And they lay wait for their own blood; they lurk privily for their own lives.”* Notice when we hang around the wrong company we end up doing it to our own destruction, because the Bible says, *“..they lay wait for their own blood...”* (Proverbs 1:18). The wrong crowd promises fun but can only give you folly. They promise you adventure but can only give you destruction.

3. For Eternity

Dr. Bob Jones Sr. said, “The greatest truth that ever changed my life was when I realized I had to live somewhere forever.” We should be in the world, but not of the world. We should make good company our mainstay and avoid associations with the wrong crowd if we are going to compromise with them. How about the lost people who don't know Christ and we want to be a witness to them? I love this story that illustrates the point and also shows the power of influence not only for time but also for eternity.

I had an old preacher friend, now with the Lord, who went to school with a young man who went a totally different direction from him. After serving time in the armed forces during World War II, he finished preparation for ministry and then settled down into a pastorate near his old boyhood friend's home. Shortly after moving, the old friend invited him and his wife for an evening meal. Soon after dinner, the conversation quickly went to matters of the faith. The old friend was a skeptic as well as an unbeliever. He kept bringing one question after another to the preacher. The preacher could have entered into an argument but after every question, the preacher simply answered, “The Bible says in I John 5:12, *‘He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.’*” Finally, after about two hours of only one answer for every potential argument, the skeptic asked, “Is that all you can say, *‘He that hath the Son hath*

life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life?" They talked late into the night and left without resolution. Three days later, the skeptic called up his old friend, the preacher and asked if he would come over. As soon as the preacher was invited in, his friend said, "All I have been hearing in my mind day and night since you left was '*He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.*' I can't stand it any longer," he cried, "I've got to get saved and have that life!" This story also illustrates not only the power of our influence, but also the power in the Word of God! A book was written decades ago entitled, How to Win Friends and Influence People. Just a few years ago, a fellow colleague of mine who taught in the college where I taught, wrote a book that played upon the former title and said, How to Win Friends and Influence People For Heaven. And this is exactly what all of us can do who have a saving knowledge of Christ. May God help us to take advantage and seize the day to influence all we can for God, for good and for Heaven.

-Pastor Pope-